

THE CANADIAN MAGAZINE

OF
SCIENCE AND THE INDUSTRIAL ARTS.

Patent Office Record.

Vol. XIX.

SEPTEMBER, 1891.

No. 9.

THE SANITARY REGISTRATION OF DWELLINGS*

The purpose of this paper is to enforce the view that all dwellings hereafter to be built and certain classes of dwellings already erected should be provided—first, with a system of house drainage so arranged and constructed as to guard the inmates from the noxious influence of so-called sanitary appliances; secondly, with a protected indoor water supply as distinguished from a wholesome supply at the fountain head; and lastly, that the dwellings referred to, when so provided and on production of a sanitary certificate granted by competent authority, should be entered in some competent register.

It cannot be denied that the existing legislative provisions as to house drainage and water-supply protection are insufficient to maintain the degree of safety necessary for preserving health, and although other matters appertaining to house sanitation deserve consideration, the two subjects mentioned demand urgent attention, and ought to be dealt with more effectively by competent authority. While adequate ventilation of a house, inodorous surroundings and other matters are of considerable importance, many of them are largely dealt with by existing law. Further, there is this marked difference between some of these useful requirements and those specially pressed by this paper. Bad ventilation and ill-placed dustbins are obvious defects, the purchaser or hirer of a house cannot say that he is misled or deceived, and the maxim *caveat emptor* applies. But with regard to faulty arrangements in the domestic closets and waste pipes and defective and ill-contrived water-cisterns the case is different. The offending point may be discoverable only by the observing powers of an expert or may be concealed from every one until revealed by illness or the breaking up of a building. The mischief is insidious, and as the emanations from sewer connections are of serious consequence to inmates of dwellings it seems only reasonable to draw a distinction between the open and obvious defect and the insidious approach of a concealed danger, and to urge that to meet this danger Government action may be properly invoked.

It is no doubt true that existing law provides that water-closets or equivalent arrangements shall be supplied and that drainage shall be attended to, and it is also the case that under certain circumstances and after certain formalities, entrance of officials into occupied dwellings is authorised to ascertain that the necessary sanitary conveniences have been provided. But it does not appear that a faulty construction of such appliances can be dealt with unless the fault is glaring and the evil therefrom amounts almost to a nuisance to outsiders. In order, therefore, to enabling intending occupiers of new dwellings to be saved from injury it is essential not only that these should be provided with the usual appliances, but that they should be inspected and pronounced good in themselves and suitably adapted to those dwellings. For otherwise the mere requirement that domestic conveniences shall be provided almost amounts in many cases to a statutory obligation to undergo illness or suffer death.

In regard to the water supply, the point now urged is that water for drinking should be protected after its introduction to the house, for obviously, however good it may be at the fountain head, this is of little advantage if it become affected by pollution within the walls of the dwelling. Protection from this should be insisted upon both as regards possible contamination by emanations from discharge pipes and also as regards the position of the drinking-water cistern, so that it shall not be a receptacle for dust or inaccessible for purposes of investigation or periodical cleaning.

With regard to existing dwellings, however, the difficulty of rigorously enforcing such requirements is very great. To insist upon all such buildings being brought at once (even if it were practically possible) to the ideal standard of sanitation would, by reason of the heavy cost and the occasional disarrangement of the buildings, prove an unreasonable demand upon the resources of individuals. But it is conceived first that, without in such cases quite approaching the ideal standard, a minimum standard might be adopted which would still be of considerable sanitary value. Next that the lower standard might be enforced after the completion of a long tenancy or period of years.

As to water, however, whatever minimum of house sanitation experts might consider sufficient, I trust it would not be deemed too severe a demand if, as to

*A paper by Mr. Henry Rutherford, barrister-at-law delegate from the Sanitary Assurance Association, read at the International Congress of Hygiene and Demography.